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Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Second session
Maastricht, the Netherlands, 3 and 4 July 2014
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda
Promotion and capacity-building: provision of technical assistance

Promotion of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

Prepared by Armenia and Belarus in consultation with the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol and the secretariat

Summary

In accordance with the decision of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, as contained in the work programme for the Protocol for 2011–2014, inter alia, to "further the knowledge of the Protocol throughout the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region and beyond" and to "increase the number of Parties to the Protocol" (ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1, decision I/6, annex I, item E),[1] the present document contains a proposal for activities for the promotion of the Protocol in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The document was prepared by Armenia and Belarus on the basis of the outcomes of a consultation with national focal points of the countries concerned, pursuant to the decision of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol at its second meeting (Geneva, 20–21 November 2012) (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2012/2, para. 23 (c), (d) and (e)).[2] The Bureau provided its comments on the proposal at its fifth meeting (Madrid, 2–3 July 2013)

[1] Available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/mopp1.html.

and advised Belarus and Armenia to revise the document in the light of these comments. The revised document (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2013/4) was submitted to the Working Group of the Parties at its third meeting (Geneva, 20–21 November 2013). The Working Group welcomed the document on the Promotion of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2013/4) and agreed to submit it to the second session of the Meeting of the Parties for endorsement, as a document describing an overall framework for possible areas for bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The Working Group also agreed to oversee the progress in implementing this framework in the future.

Furthermore, the Working Group agreed that:

(a) Interested delegations could provide general comments on the proposal to the secretariat before 15 December 2013;

(b) Thereafter, the secretariat, would distribute the proposal to National focal/contact points to the Protocol in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia for comments.

No comments to the document were received during these consultations. The document is therefore submitted to the Meeting of the Parties without any substantive changes.

I. Introduction

1. The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) was adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on 21 May, 2003 in Kyiv. The Protocol is an independent multilateral environmental agreement, which entered into force on 8 October 2009. The Protocol has been signed by 38 countries (including Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine). As of 1 March 2013, 32 countries are Parties to the Protocol, mostly members of the European Union.

2. The aim of this proposal is to accelerate accession to the Protocol by countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and the development of national pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs) in these countries.

3. During the first session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 20–22 April 2010), delegates from these countries expressed a strong interest in the Protocol, and identified the need for technical and human resources for capacity-building (e.g., sharing of experience and best practice) as the main challenges to the accession to the Protocol.

4. The first subregional workshop, "Get Your Right to a Healthy Community", for countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia was held on 3 and 4 November 2011 in Minsk. The goal of the workshop was, inter alia, to identify the key needs of the countries of the subregion in relation to implementing PRTRs and to promote the ratification of the Protocol in these countries. In addition, a special session was organized at the second meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 20–21 November 2012),[3] and several thematic surveys were carried out by the secretariat to further identify these countries' needs.

5. The major common needs for these countries, as identified through the workshop[4] and the surveys,[5] are as follows:

(a) With regard to setting up an appropriate institutional structure:

(i) Staff training;

(ii) Increased sharing of information and cooperation between institutions;

(iii) Modernization;

(iv) Establishment of a coordination mechanism, including a single agency to host the PRTR database with responsibility for performing data validation and publishing the data;

(b) In relation to the regulatory framework for data collection and dissemination and for public participation and access to information and justice:

[3] Note on bilateral session (PRTR/WG.1/2012/Inf.5) available from http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=28225.

[4] The report of the workshop (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2012/3) is available from http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=28225.

[5] Detailed results of the surveys are available from http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/treaties/public-participation/protocol-on-prtrs/areas-of-work/envppprtrcb/surveys.html.

(i) An upgrade of legislation, including development of legal documents required for the accession to the Protocol;

(ii) Development of calculation methods;

(iii) Consultations between the stakeholders;

(iv) Adaptation of existing reporting systems to the Protocol requirements;

(c) In relation to data management:

(i) Verification of information due to lack of automated reporting;

(ii) Experts for data verification and measurement taking;

(iii) Improved methods of pollutants release calculation;

(iv) Harmonization of national lists of pollutants to the PRTR list;

(v) Fundraising;

(vi) Training and workshops;

(vii) A material and technical basis (including software);

(d) In relation to access to data and its dissemination:

(i) Computer software and support to create PRTR databases;

(ii) Software for data publication in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the possibility of using the E-PRTR software platform;

(iii) Improvement in the usage of information technologies and access to the Internet;

(iv) Technical capability to input and upload data;

(v) Qualified specialists;

(vi) A unified programme;

(vii) Training for journalists, staff, non-governmental organizations and business;

(viii) Workshops;

(ix) Legal regulations to ensure the dissemination of information and access to it;

(x) Provision of a central repository for national PRTR links (via the PRTR.net portal);

(e) The main barriers to building capacity, public awareness and international cooperation are limited financial resources and expertise, limited interest in using a PRTR, lack of accredited laboratories, limited market availability of measurement equipment, the high cost of equipment and limited communication and cooperation with industrial facilities. As a result, the following key needs were identified:

(i) Information technology tools;

(ii) Verification of data;

(iii) Shared environmental information systems;

(iv) A methodology for making PRTR tools available free for countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia;

(v) Better cooperation and mechanisms to enable countries with advanced experience in PRTRs to help countries seeking to develop PRTRs;

(vi) Greater access to the Internet in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

II. Activities

6. Taking into account the provisions of articles 15 (Capacity-building) and 16 (International cooperation) of the Protocol on PRTRs, and considering the large scope of the activities that need to be carried out by countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to create their first national PRTRs, in addition to bilateral assistance to be pursued by individual countries, it is suggested that the following activities be undertaken in accordance with item B (Technical assistance) of the draft work programme for 2015–2017 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2013/10, annex):

(a) The creation of a group of experts from countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, who will keep in constant contact via e-mail or through online forums/webinars offered by PRTR:Learn[6] in order to share their experience, successes and challenges in developing national PRTRs and information on ongoing projects, including pilot projects and the contact information of possible donors for PRTR projects. The group could also meet at the margins of relevant events, such as Working Group of the Parties, subregional workshops or other meetings;

(b) The development of national strategies for PRTR promotion and consultation;

(c) The development and implementation of national and regional PRTR projects;

(d) The creation of a database of European Union experts who will assist countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in implementation of specific provisions of the Protocol;

(e) The involvement of experts from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region in consultations, the provision of technical assistance and participation in Protocol events, as well as in sharing PRTR-related experience of the European Union, the United States of America and Canada;

(f) The provision of a free computer program for PRTRs to countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and its translation into the Russian language;

(g) The organization of international meetings, trainings and workshops and the attraction of additional funding for them, using the existing potential of the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia;

(h) The development of training courses to involve non-governmental organizations in PRTR implementation;

(i) The organization of international meetings (round tables, conferences), dedicated to the discussion of challenges to the development and functioning of national PRTRs by the Department of International Scientific Cooperation of the Belarusian Scientific and Research Centre "Ecology" (Minsk);

(j) The continuation, by the secretariat of the Aarhus Convention, of assistance to countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in finding EU partners to help them establish and implement national PRTRs. The secretariat should also help in

[6] See http://prtr.unitar.org/

involving more donors and interested organizations and other stakeholders in implementing the provisions of the Protocol in the target countries.

III. Financial and other support

7. The activities are expected to be funded by sources other than the ECE trust fund for the implementation of the Protocol's work programme. Thus, possible sources of financial and other support will be multiple and might include:

(a) Different modalities for the provision of technical assistance described in the note on technical assistance and resources (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2012/4);[7]

(b) Support of partner organizations participating in the capacity-building coordination under the Aarhus Convention[8] and in the International PRTR Coordinating Group,[9] such as the Regional Environmental Centres, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the United Nations Development Programme, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme/Global Environment Facility, etc.;

(c) National industry and international corporations, including the European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC) and the European Environment Agency;

(d) Funds of international financial institutions;

(e) Other international technical assistance.

8. Implementation of the activities will help to build the countries' capacities for the establishment of national PRTRs and make the role of PRTRs more understandable and transparent to key stakeholders (e.g., government, business, the public), which, in turn, will serve as an additional incentive for countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to join the Protocol. Furthermore, the current document will provide partner organizations with a clear framework for assisting these countries in implementing PRTRs.

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[7] Available from http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=28225.
[8] See http://www.unece.org/env/pp/oa.html.
[9] See http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcgimages/about.html.